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AN
ADMONITION
AGAINST
PROFANE AND COMMON
SWEARING.
IN
A LETTER FROM A MINISTER
TO HIS
PARISHIONERS.

TO BE PUT PRIVATELY INTO THE HANDS OF PERSONS
WHO ARE ADDICTED TO SWEARING.

BY THE RIGHT REV. FATHER IN GOD,
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LATE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

A NEW EDITION.

London:

PRINTED FOR F. AND C. RIVINGTON,
BOOKSELLERS TO THE
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE,
NO. 62, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD,
By Bye and Law, St. John's Square, Clerkenwell.



1800,

1578/3006

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PROFANE AND COMMON

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A PRIVATE
ADMONITION

AGAINST PROFANE AND COMMON

SWEARING.

Neighbour,

IT is out of a true Respect I have for you, and a hearty Concern for the Good of your Soul, that I put into your Hands this *private* Admonition against SWEARING; since the *publick* Warnings you have heard from the Pulpit do not seem to have had their Effect upon you. If you will think and consider, you cannot but know that the Custom of Vain-Swearing, into which you are unhappily fallen, is a great Sin, against which God has denounced very heavy judgments. And how nearly it concerns me, who am your Spiritual Pastor, to *warn* you of your Danger, you will see by the Command which God has laid upon every Pastor of his Church, (Ezek. iii. 18.) *When I say unto the Wicked, Thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not Warning, nor speakest not to warn the Wicked from his wicked Way to save his Life; the same wicked Man shall die in his Iniquity, but his Blood will I require at thy Hand.*

Wherefore, I beseech you to take this Admonition in good Part, and to listen to it as a

Warning sent you by the Providence of God, to deliver your Soul from eternal Destruction. Do not spend Time in guessing or enquiring how I came to understand that you are particularly guilty of this Sin; but since you know it to be true, and the Consequence of your going on without Reproof should have been your Ruin for ever; esteem it as a special Mercy and Favour from God: And in Token of your receiving it as such, consider and lay to Heart this plain Account.

I. Of the *Sinfulness* of Vain Swearing,

II. Of the *Folly* of it.

I. Consider the great *Sinfulness* of this Practice; which you may easily learn, as well from the express *Precepts* whereby the Scripture forbids it, as from the many *Aggravations* of the Guilt of this Sin above any other.

1. Consider how plainly the Scripture forbids all Idle and Vain-Swearing, of what Kind soever, whether by Things in Heaven, or Things on the Earth.

To begin with the vain Use of the *Name* of GOD (which is so often in the Mouths of common Swearers:). You know what the Third Commandment tells you, (Exod. xx. 7.) *Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him Guiltless that taketh his Name in vain.* For although his Commandment, as given to the *Jews*, was only understood to forbid *Perjury* or *False Swearing*; yet being interpreted in a Christian Sense, it is a Precept against all vain and common Swearing,

and especially by the Name of God. I shall put you in Mind, by and by, how expressly our Saviour forbids Christians to swear by the Creatures, because of the Relation they bear to their Creator; and because as they are the Creatures of God, to swear by *them* is in Effect to swear by *God*; and then it must be a Sin of a much higher Nature, for Men in their common Conversation to swear directly by *God* himself.

The Name of God is pronounced in Scripture, to be holy, and glorious, and reverend; and it is one Part of the Prayer, which our Saviour taught us, that *God's Name may be hallowed*; that is, that it may be thought and spoken of by us and all other Persons, with great Seriousness and Reverence, as a Name that is sanctified and set above common and ordinary Use. Which ought to teach all Christians to use it sparingly and reverently; not to bring it too familiarly into any of their Discourses concerning the Affairs of this World, much less to mix it daily and hourly (as the common Swearers do) with their Sports and Passions, their Riots and Excesses.

2. The same Thing is to be said of the Name of *Jesus Christ*, the Son of God, and the Saviour of Mankind; concerning whom the Scriptures declare, (*Phil. ii. 9.*) *That God hath highly exalted him, and given him a Name which is above every Name; that at the Name of JESUS every Knee shall bow, of Things in Heaven and Things in Earth, and Things under the Earth.* A Declaration that should teach every Christian the greatest Reverence to that holy and blessed Name,

through which alone he can be saved. And yet how little is this remembered or regarded by many careless and profane Christians, who allow themselves in a wicked Habit of bringing in the sacred Name of JESUS and CHRIST to express their Wonder, and confirm their Promises or Purposes, in the most slight and trivial Matters.

Or if they forbear to use the Names of *God*, of *Jesus*, and *Christ*, they will not scruple to swear by their *Maker*, or their *Redeemer*; although these and the like, being only other Names for *God* and *Christ*, are as much a Profanation (when they are mixed by Men with their ordinary Discourse) as the direct Use of the Names themselves. And the Reason is plain, because by the Names of *Maker* and *Redeemer*, the Divine Beings are evidently expressed and understood; and it is from the common and familiar Use of Matters Holy and Divine, that the Sin of profane Swearing arises, by whatsoever Names the Divine Things or Beings are expressed.

The Reason why such Names ought not to be mixt with the common Concerns of the World, is, because they are of a divine and heavenly Nature. We ought not to make the Names *familiar*, because the Beings meant and expressed by them are infinitely above us, in Station, Power, and all other Perfections; and are therefore the proper Objects of our Dread and Fear, our Honour and Reverence. Again; such Names ought to be used sparingly, because common Use wears off the Veneration that belongs to those high and glorious Beings, and by

Degrees brings the most sacred Things into Contempt. For it is in vain to hope, that the Mind will preserve a serious Regard to the Beings, if the Tongue be allowed a common and unse-rious Use of the Names.

3. Next to the profane Use of such *Names* as signify *Beings* that are Divine, is a like profane Use of *Words* which signify *Things* of a Divine and Holy Nature, such as are proper only to Religion, and the Concern of our Souls and another World; as our *Faith*, our *Redemption*, our *Salvation*, or in general, any Expressions which are peculiar to the Holy Scriptures. These are weighty and serious Things; and as the Things immediately concern Religion, so the Names and Expressions are only proper to Religious Exercises and Discourses. And it is by no means consistent with a Christian Con-versation to use them otherwise than seriously, much less to a Habit of using them lightly, and least of all to frame them into *Jests* (to which the Language of Holy Scripture is so frequently abused by profane Men;) or, what is our present Case, to frame them into *Oaths* and *Curses*. And yet how common it is with many Christians, in their ordinary Discourse, to desire this or that to be done *for the Love of God*, or *the Sake of God*, or *of Christ*: And to declare the most trifling Things to be true, with a solemn *Vow*, upon their *Faith*, or upon their *Salvation*, or, as *God shall save them*, or *judge them*; and to vent their Rage and Passion in horrible Oaths, by the *Blood* and the *Wounds* of the Son of God and the Redeemer of Men; the hearing of which

is enough to make any serious Christian to tremble. All such Oaths (as well as those others by the Names of God and *Christ*, and of our *Maker* and *Redeemer*) do carry in them a double Guilt. 1. The profaning of Things by common Use, which are sanctified to a Religious Use; and which, as they immediately relate to the great Business of another Life, do require our most serious Thoughts and Meditations, and ought never to be uttered in an idle or trifling Way. 2. The Guilt of *rash* and *Vain Swearing*, when Men are not called to it, and there is no real Occasion for it, nor any good or wise Purpose served by it.

4. For although the Swearing by Things that are *holy* is a great *Aggravation* of Guilt, as it adds Profaneness to the Sin of Swearing; yet it is to be remembered, that all Vain Swearing, by what Things soever, in Heaven or in Earth, is expressly condemned and forbidden by our Blessed Saviour, (Matt. v. 34, 35, 36, 37.) *I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by Heaven, for it is God's Throne; nor by Earth, for it is his Footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the City of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy Head, because thou canst not make one Hair white or black. But let your Communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of Evil.* And in like Manner, St. James, (James v. 12.) *Above all Things my Brethren, swear not; neither by Heaven, neither by the Earth, neither by any other Oath; but let your yea, be yea, and your nay, nay, lest you fall into Condemnation.*

These are plain and positive Precepts, which ought to be well considered and understood by the Vain-Swearers; as directly forbidding that, which they (in Contempt of the Authority of our Blessed Saviour and his Apostle) make their daily and hourly Practice. And the Things which they ought to know and observe concerning them, are chiefly these. 1. That they were occasioned by a mistaken Opinion among the *Jews*, that if they did not swear directly by *God*, it was no Sin to swear by his Creatures. And considering how common it is among Christians, to swear by the *Heavens*, by their *Life*, by their *Soul*, and by other Creatures of *God*, one would think they were of the same Opinion of the *Jews*, and had never heard of those clear and direct Precepts of the Gospel against it. 2. They are to observe the *Reasons*, why our Saviour and his Apostle forbid this Sort of Swearing; both because the Creatures of *God* are not in our Power to be used by us otherwise than he has appointed, and because the immediate Relation which they bear to *God* as their Creator, makes the Swearing by them, in Effect, a Swearing by *God*. 3. The common Swearer is more especially concerned to observe the *Cause*, and the *Consequence*, of this Sin. The *Cause*, in what our Saviour here tells him, that it cometh of *Evil*, (either of an evil Heart, void of all Reverence towards *God*, or of the evil one, that is of the Devil.) The *Consequence*, in what *St. James* adds, that it brings them into *Condemnation*. 4. Let him diligently attend to that most excellent Rule for the daily Conversation of a Christian, *Let your Communication be yea,*

yea, and nay, nay; in your common Discourse, (of which our Saviour is speaking,) go no farther in enforcing what you say, than bare Affirmations and Denials. In Courts of Justice, and to serve any serious and weighty Purpose, an Oath *in Truth and Righteousness* may lawfully be taken; but in ordinary Discourse, what our Saviour Christ has here said, must be the Rule of every Person who desires to maintain a *Christian Conversation*.

Hitherto you have seen the *Sinfulness* of common Swearing: And every Practice that is sinful being a Transgression of some Law, I have shewn you, that this is a Transgression of a plain and positive Law given by *Jesus Christ*. And the more clear and express this Law is, the greater is the Guilt of going on in an open Contempt of it.

2. You shall now see the *Aggravations of Guilt*, which render *common Swearers* more wicked and inexcusable than any other Sinners whatsoever.

One great Aggravation is, That there is no *Temptation* to Swearing: By the Commission of most other Sins, some natural Desire or Inclination is satisfied, or some present Interest is served. But the common Swearer has nothing of this Kind to plead in his Excuse: He cannot say, there is any Thing in his *Constitution* that inclines him to Swearing, or that he serves any worldly Purpose or Advantage by it; and therefore he sins for the Sake of Sinning, only to defy and provoke God. Now the less Temptation there is to commit any Sin, the Commission of it becomes more inexcusable, and a higher Contempt of the Authority which has forbidden it;

and since there is no Temptation at all to Vain-Swearing, it is in this Respect more inexcusable, and a greater Degree of Perverseness, and a more obstinate Contempt of God and his Laws, than any other Sin.

Another Aggravation of the Guilt of Common Swearing, is the *Frequency* of it; that it is repeated every Day, and every Hour, nay, almost every Minute, after it is grown into a Habit. Oaths flow from such Men without thinking, and are a constant and almost necessary Part of their Mirth, Passion and Discourse. Now, if every *single* Act of Sin renders us Guilty in the Sight of God; what a dreadful Degree of Guilt must rest upon the Soul of the Common Swearer, who is perpetually adding to the Account, and heaping up Wrath against the Day of Wrath. The Tongue is a nimble Member which moves swiftly, and, if ill employed, multiplies Sin apace: And as the noblest Work that belongs to it, is, to set forth the Praises of God on Earth, as the Saints and Angels do in Heaven; so he who accustoms it to Oaths and Curses, is daily preparing it for the Language of Hell. And the Time is coming, (if he repent not,) when he will have Cause to wish a Thousand Times over, that he had been born as dumb as the Beasts that perish; or, since he was not, that he had perished like them.

When you have read and considered this short Account of the *Sinfulness* of *Common Swearing*, go on and reflect seriously, in the next Place,

II. Upon the great Folly of it. Consider how Men fall at first into the Custom of Swear-

ing; that it is never taken up (as all wise Designs are) with Consideration, or upon a Foresight of any Benefit that is like to arise from it; but is usually owing to profane Company, and suffered to grow into a Habit through a supine careless Humour, for want of thinking what is right or wrong, lawful or unlawful, wise or foolish. And no Practice can be more unreasonable, than that which is owing purely to the Want of *Thought*, and which Men never could fall into if they would think; that is, if they would make use of their Reason, and shew themselves Men.

Accordingly, we see this Sin reigns most when Men are least themselves, in Times of Rage and Passion, and Drunkenness; when their Reason is gone, and they are indeed no longer Men. Nay, some are never guilty of Swearing, but in those short Seasons of Madness; being able at all other Times to see the Folly of it, and to comply with their Judgment and Conscience in abstaining from it. Which should make the Common Swearer ashamed to see that he is doing that all Day long, which others, (and they none of the most Innocent) never will do but in a Fit of Madness. And these last do so far well, to abstain from it at all *other* Times; but their Fault is, that at those Times they are apt to excuse it, and scarce allow it to be a Sin, because (they say) they are not themselves. Whereas, if they would reason truly, and like Christians, it must be thus: That since Rage and Passion, and Drunkenness, are very sinful, and to be avoided by every Christian, though they be single and alone; they in whom they are generally accom-

panied with Swearing, are bound to *double* Diligence in avoiding them, because they know they usually bring with them a *double* Guilt; namely, their own, and that of Vain Swearing. One Sin can never be a just Excuse for another; but it is a good Reason why Men should increase their Care and Watchfulness against one Sin, when they know it usually brings another with it.

But though these Fits of Madness, into which Men cast themselves, were any Excuse for Swearing, (as they are certainly none,) yet the common and habitual Swearer would have no right to plead them. For however they may make his Oaths more *dreadful* and more *horrible* than at other Times, yet, when these Heats are over, his Course of Swearing and Profaneness goes on; and he is so far from seeking Excuses, and endeavouring to charge it upon Passion and Drunkenness, that he seems to *approve* and *chuse* it, adding a *Grace*, or *Credit*, or *Authority*, to his Discourse.

But what Gracefulness can there be in a Language, which none use but the wild, unthinking, profligate Part of Mankind; and which gives great Offence and Uneasiness to every sober and good Man; and I may add, a Language which is no where so common as among the meaner Sort, and in the most unpolished Conversation.

And as to the gaining *Credit* or *Belief* to what he says; it were well if he would at least refrain from Oaths, till his Credit is called in Question: But where Swearing is grown into a Habit, it breaks out equally upon any Occasion, or no Occasion: And in Cases where there is most

Occasion; that is, when they cannot easily make themselves believed, it stands them in no Stead; because none will believe him the more for Swearing, who is known to have lost all *Reverence* for an Oath. The bare Word of a sober serious Man, has far more Weight than a thousand Oaths of the common Swearer.

Nor is he less mistaken, when he supposes, that bold and outrageous Swearing adds to his *Authority*, and makes him appear brave and terrible in the Eyes of his Inferiors. It is true, Rage and Fury are the usual Fore-runners of *Violence*, and these force Obedience for the Time; but as Violence makes him inwardly hated by his Servants, so Swearing makes him pitied and despised by them, and both together make him accounted little better than a Madman by all about him. The only true Way to be sure of Duty and Respect from Inferiors, is Calmness and Decency in the Commands and Admonitions of the Superiors. And while Men fancy they shew the greater Courage and Bravery, the more frequent and horrible their Oaths are; they should consider what wretched Courage that must be, which consists in provoking and defying Almighty God.

For this is the Folly above all Follies; that though Men know the Judgments which God has denounced against this Sin, and what will be the Portion of profane and common Swearers; they will yet go on so perversely and obstinately, to pull down the Divine Vengeance upon their own Heads.

You cannot but know how expressly the Scripture declares, that God *will not hold him*

guiltless that taketh his Name in vain, (Exod. xx. 7.) that the Sin of *Vain-Swearing* proceeds in a particular Manner from an *evil Heart*, or the *evil one*, that is the Devil, (Matt. v. 37.) and that it brings Men *into Condemnation*, (Jam. v. 12.)

If you knew these Things, why would you suffer yourself, all this while, to be led by a foolish Habit, and an unreasonable Humour, to defy God, and destroy your own Soul? If you did not know or consider them before, lay them seriously to Heart now; and as you desire the Favour of God, and the Salvation of your Soul, continue no longer in a Practice which you know will deprive you of both. Believe me, it is a Warning of too great Moment to be slighted; and therefore, read and mark diligently what I have here drawn up, to convince you of the Sinfulness, the Folly, and the Danger of Vain Swearing: And, reflecting at the same Time how long you have lived in this Course, and what a dreadful Number of Oaths you have already to account for, humble yourself in the Sight of God, and earnestly bewail the Profaneness of your Life. Atone for what is past, by a hearty Sorrow and Repentance, and satisfy yourself, that your Repentance is sincere, by entering into the firmest Resolution, that from henceforth your Conversation shall be such as *becomes the Gospel of Christ*. And remember how difficult a Thing it is to govern a Tongue that is accustomed to Swearing, from which Oaths slide unawares; first, pray to God that he will enable you to *set a Watch before your Mouth*, and keep the Door of your Lips; and

then request of those with whom you most frequently converse, that they will be your Monitors, if at any Time you happen to forget yourself.

By these Means you will be happily delivered out of a Course of great Sin and Folly, and of infinite Danger to Body and Soul. And if this Admonition prove the first Occasion of your Deliverance, (as I hope, by the Blessing of God it will,) praise and adore the Goodness of his Providence, who hath not suffered you to go on securely in your Sin; and make yourself the Instrument of his Glory, by endeavouring to reclaim others from the same unhappy Course; which is the most proper Satisfaction you can make to God for your former Profaneness.

You cannot think, that I have any other *Motive* in sending this, besides my own Duty, and your Good. It is a Satisfaction to me to have gone thus far in a Discharge of my Duty, as a Minister of Christ, and your Spiritual Pastor; but it will be a much greater Comfort, to find that this *Admonition* proves *effectual* upon you. And that God, *who worketh in us all both to will and to do*, will be graciously pleased to make it effectual, is the earnest Prayer of,

Your truly loving and affectionate

Friend and Pastor.

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